

Remarks:

At the time of the outstanding Office Action, the pending claims in the application were claims 1-68. The outstanding Office Action identified claims 26, 30, 31, and 46 as being "allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims." (See Office Action; page 27). By this amendment, Applicant has (1) amended claims 26, 30, 31, and 46 into independent form including all of the limitations of their respective base claims and intervening claims, (2) amended dependent claims 13, 23, 27, 32, 33, 38, 44, 47, 49, and 50 to depend from amended claims 26 and 46 as appropriate, (3) added new dependent claims 69-102 that depend from amended claims 30 and 31 (and which generally correspond to the dependent claims that depend from amended claim 26), and (4) canceled claims 1-12, 22, 25, 37, 43, and 51-68 without prejudice. No new matter is present. The pending claims are now claims 13-21, 23-24, 26-36, 38-42, 44-50, and 69-102. Of these claims, the independent claims are claims 26, 30, 31, and 46.

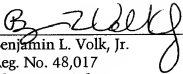
Applicant respectfully submits that all pending claims are in condition for allowance.

If the Examiner believes, for any reason, that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at the number provided below.

Furthermore, by this response, Applicant does not acquiesce to any of the claims rejections present in the outstanding Office Action. Applicant reserves the right to pursue the subject matter of the canceled and original claims via one or more continuation patent application. Moreover, should Applicant later need to further respond to these or new claim rejections, Applicant reserves the right to fully respond to these and any other new rejections, including but not limited to further amending the claims and/or adding new claims, submitting evidence in favor of the patentability of the claims, disputing the alleged prior art status of the cited references if warranted, and raising new arguments in favor of patentability. Moreover, in submitting this response, Applicant also does not acquiesce to any characterizations of the claims or art (including any characterizations about what is allegedly known in the art) made in the outstanding Office Action.

A speedy and favorable action is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,



Benjamin L. Volk, Jr.
Reg. No. 48,017
Thompson Coburn LLP
One US Bank Plaza
St. Louis, Missouri 63101
(314) 552-6352
(314) 552-7352 (fax)